TUNGDUNGE MUNDHUM:

Core Evidence of Kirat Limbu Culture and History

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Tungdunge Mundhum: Core Evidence of Kirat Limbu Culture and History.

Abstract

Tungdunge Mundhum in Kirat is an important oral knowledge of the Limbu community, which is not only a religious or mythological story, but a living document of the historical memory, cultural identity and ethnic consciousness of the community. This narrative is especially prevalent in Samba clan and has survived orally for generations. Tungdunge Mundhum covers the ancient migration, social structure and cultural values of the Kirat Limbus. It is as deep and intellectual as the Hindu Vedas and other ancient texts, which combine spiritual philosophy, social unity and historical facts.

This article analyzes the cultural, social and historical significance of Tungdunge Mundhum from an anthropological, historical and sociological point of view by Dr. Nawa Raj Subba's research entitled An Investigation of Tungdunge Mundhum, A Kirat Mythology (2023). This study presents Mundhum as a historical and cultural document rather than a myth.

The story highlights the identity of the Samba clan, its relationship with the Sen dynasty, and the cultural continuity of the Kirat community. Tungdunge Mundhum contributes to the preservation of social unity and identity by making the Limbu community aware of their cultural roots and pride in modern times.

Keywords: Tungdunge mundhum, Samba clan, Kirat Limbu ethnics, epic saga, classic tale, historical investigation

1. Introduction

Mundhum is a shared oral tradition of the Kirat community, encompassing stories of their religion, culture and history (Chemjong, 1965). This tradition survives differently in Kirat communities such as Limbu, Rai, Dhimal (Chemjong, 2003). Tungdunge Mundhum is especially prevalent in the Samba Thar of the Limbu community. It is related to the journey of Tungdunge, the youngest son of King Kokaha-Baraha of the Mundhum Koshi Barah region. He had gone from Saptakoshi to Arun, Barun, Mewa Khola and Tambar areas in search of his brothers (Chongbang, 2009).

It is not merely a religious tale, it is also the record of the antiqued migration, of the dynastic connections and social organization of Kirat Limbu. Dr. This story is analyzed in the book An Investigation of Tungdunge Mundhum (2023) by Nawa Raj Subba who connects this story with historical, archaeological and social pieces of evidence. The present article considers Tungdunge Mundhum as a source of cultural heritage, historical resources and social solidarity. This mundhum endorses the cultural pride, historical continuity and identity of the Kirat Limbu people.

2. Research method

2.1 Types of research

The research method on which this paper is founded is qualitative research, which examines the culture and social as well as historical importance of Tungdunge Mundhum. Following methods will be applied:

(i). Historical Investigation: Oral Traditions, The Phedangba Records, Kirat Limbu Booklet and Journal and articles in academic Journals.

(ii). Cultural Studies: Interpretation of customs, beliefs and symbols covered in Mundhum.

(iii). Field study: Interviews and observations of rituals in Kirat Limbu settlement.

2.2 Data collection

1. Primary Statistics:

(i). In-depth interviews with 5 Phedangba/Yeba/Yuma (religious experts) and 10 Limbu elders.

(ii). An in-depth interview on Facebook Messenger with Tungdunge Mundhum Knowledgea of Ninglekhu, Maswa, Kurumbang Limbu clans.

(iii). Observation of Tungdunge Mundhum-related rituals.

2. Secondary Statistics: Kirat Limbu History Books, Journals, Theses and Government Archives.

2.3 Data analysis

(i). Thematic analysis: The study of the main subjects of Mundhum (creation fiction, moral education, medical knowledge).

(ii). Comparative study: Comparing Tungdunge Mundhum with mundhum of Tungdunge, which is prevalent in limbu other than Samba, and mundhum found in Rai and Dhimal communities.

(iii). Historical comparison: A comparative study with the Yonghang, Chabegu, Lingden Limbu lineages originating from the Sen dynasty. It also compares with existing studies on Kirat Limbu.

2.4 Values of ethics

(i). Consent: Interviewees consented to take part in the interview following their appreciation of the intent of the research.

(ii). Cultural Sensibility: The divine knowledge of Mundhum is rendered in a decent manner.

(iii). Confidentiality: The personal information of the participants is confidentially maintained.

2.5 Limitations

(i). Mundhum is based on oral tradition, written sources are limited.

(ii). Information on old phedangba is not available in writing.

(iii). The dates and facts of historical events are mixed with myth.

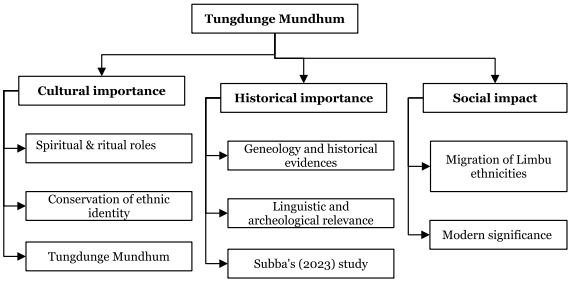
2.6 Conceptual framework of study

This conceptual framework views Tungdunge Mundhum in three dimensions:

(i). Cultural (identity, spirituality),

(ii). Historical (genealogy, linguistic evidence),

(iii) Social (modern influence).



Adapted by- Subba, N. R. (2025)

3. Cultural Significance of Tungdunge Mundhum

3.1 Plot of Tungdunge Mundhum

Tungdunge Mundhum tells the story of Tungdunge, the youngest son of King Kokaha-Baraha of Koshi Barah region. He travels from Saptakoshi to Arun, Barun, Mewa Khola and Tambar areas in search of his brothers. This story covers the context of Tungdunge being welcomed by the Samba dynasty into the Mewa River and giving education and power to Samba (Chongbang, 2009). This story is a symbol of the cultural and historical memory of the Limbu community.

3.2 Spiritual and ritual significance

Tungdunge Mundhum is the basis of the clan worship of the Samba dynasty. Every three years, samba priests perform rituals at Mangthan, where

Tungdunge is worshipped as an ancestral deity. This ritual involves sacrificing goats and males, reciting mundhum and wishing for the health, offspring and prosperity of the family (Chemjong, 2009). This tradition strengthens the spiritual philosophy of Kirat Limbu.

This ritual maintains social unity and cultural continuity. Tungdunge Mundhum connects the Limbu community with moral values, social discipline and spiritual consciousness. This story is not just a religious story; it is a source of philosophy of life and community unity.

3.3 Protection of ethnic identity

The Tungdunge Mundhum preserves the identity of the various substories within the samba. This story highlights the historical and cultural significance of the Samba dynasty through the context of Tungdunge's reception in the Mewa River. This story spread in the Limbu community gives samba thar a unique identity within the larger framework of the Kirat community.

The oral tradition of Mundhum preserves limbu language, culture and traditional knowledge. Mundhum, made up of the words 'mura' (mouth) and 'thum' (strong), has kept the story and knowledge alive for generations through shruti and smriti (Chemjong, 2003). This tradition strengthens the Kirat Limbu identity against the assimilation of the dominant culture.

3.4 Relationship with the greater Kirat culture

Tungdunge Mundhum also connects the Limbu community with the Rai, Dhimal and other Kirat groups. Dr. Subba's research (2023) shows similarities between tungdunge mundhum and dhimal's dhangdhange worship, indicating a common ancestor

and cultural origin. In this story, there is a mixture of Kirat, Yuma, Shaivite, Bon religion, which shows the depth and diversity of Kirat culture. Which adds to the shared cultural heritage of the Kirat community.

4. Historical importance of Tungdunge Mundhum

4.1 Genealogical and historical assessment

Tungdunge Mundhum has facilitated the documentation of the historical genealogy and migration of the Kirat Limbu community. The story portrays Tungdunge as the youngest son of Kokaha-Baraha, the king of the Sen dynasty of the Koshi Barah region. Subba's study (2023) has revealed the blood link between the Sen and Samba dynasty.

Historically, the Sen dynasty ruled vijayapur and chaudandi from the 14th to the 18th centuries (Subba, 1999). Around 1323, four brothers of the Sen dynasty spread to Dhankuta, Tehrathum, Panchthar and Sankhuwasabha, which in genealogy are called Senehang (Yonghang, 2011; Sen Chobegu, 2007). This dynasty merged with the Limbu community. In the background of Gorkha expansion, the decline of the Chaudandi kingdom in the Koshi Barah region (after

1773) is indicative of the developments of Tungdunge Mundhum. At that time, the Sen rulers there were called Mangs or deities.

In Mundhum, there is a case of Samba welcoming Tungdunge to Sulungdin in Mewa Khola area. This oral tradition was recorded by Nanda Prasad Chongbang Samba in the 19th century. The historicity of this mundhum, documented about 160 years ago, has been confirmed by various evidences (Chongbang, 2009; Subba, 2023). This Mundhumi narrative connects the relationship between the Sen and Samba dynasties and shows the historical dynamics of the Kirat Limbu community.

4.2 Archaeological, linguistic and historical context

Archaeological and linguistic evidence related to Kirat, Rai, Limbu and Samba has been examined during the study of Tungdunge Mundhum. Linguists feel that the past of the Kirat race is related with Kashi and Sumer jati, and the forefathers of the Limbu race are associated with the Lepmu people of Mesopotamia in their appraisal (Pokharel, 1998). While searching for the footprints of the word priest (shaman) or the leader Samba, some geographical and linguistic signs are still found in the journey route that has

been pierced by the ancestors of Samba i.e. Kirat Limbu. China, Burma, Kashmir, Jumla, Koshibarah region, and present-day Mewakhola-Tambarkhola area, which are on the old and large travel routes, somehow find terms related to Samba ancestors such as ethnic and geographical names, administrative ranks, symbols (Chemjong, 2003a; Oli, 1988).

Later, a branch of the Kirat dynasty, the Sen dynasty, rose from the Koshibarah region and entered Limbuwan about 800 years ago and merged into the Limbu tribe. As a result, about 700-800 years ago, some Sens adopted samba layers (Subba, 2024). In the course of development, various sub-layers were born within the Samba family. The Phyang subclan, a genealogical study, appears to have originated about 300 years ago. According to genealogy, a member of the Samba family's clothes at the time resembled swinging "Phyang Phyang" and was shaken in the air, thus the adjective gave him and his offspring the surname Phyang. However, the establishment of Samba thar Kirat limbu in Mewa Khola in the eastern Himalayan Taplejung district of Nepal is an indicator of socio-political influence.

In the background of this Tungdunge Mundhum story lies the political and social environment created by the Limbuwan-Sikkim border dispute, Gorkha-Limbuwan

tension and war. In the 18th and 19th centuries of Bikram Sambat, there is a history of a large number of Limbus migrating from Limbuwan to Limbuwan in and out of Limbuwan (Chemjong, 1974). At the same time, most of the members of the Phyang Samba ethnic migrated from Mewa Khola to Athrai Hangpang, Sankhuwasabha, Panchthar and Sikkim, which shows the resilience of the community.

The Sambas fought for a long time with Sikkim and Gorkha on behalf of limbuwan, in one war brave Samba like Shipa and Phakte were martyred (Samba Mingsra, 2018). The Limbus agreed to stop the Limbuwan-Gorkhali war and the Nunpani Treaty was signed (Chemjong, 1974) after a genealogy study conducted during the Gorkhali-Limbuwan war revealed that the ancestors of the Limbu and Sen dynasties of the Kashi dynasty, including the Samba dynasty, were in Simanggarh. According to the Phyang Samba genealogy, during the transition period 1743 i.e. 1800 B.S., most of the Phyang Samba migrated from Mewakhola to Athrai Hangpang, Sankhuwasabha, Pachthar, Sikkim during the transition period arising from the prolonged border dispute of Sikkim in the Limbuwan region and the Gorkhali influence increased (Subba, 2024).

4.3 Migration of Limbu layers

Not just Samba Limbu migrated during that time. Many other Limbu communities had also migrated due to historical, political and social reasons.

1. Samba clan: Migration of Samba Limbu is directly linked to the border dispute between Limbuwan, Sikkim, and Gorkha. This dispute has had a profound impact on the land, culture and political rights of the Limbus. There are many sub-clans within the Samba and their migration tendency is different. But one of the Samba sub-clans, Phyang, migrated from Mewa Khola (Taplejung) to Athrai Hangpang, Sankhuwasabha, Panchthar and Sikkim in 1743 (Subba, 2024). The main reasons: the border dispute with Sikkim and the tension caused by the Gorkhali expansion. They used to go to Chainpur to help the Limbuwan army, during which they reached Atharai Hangpang, Sankhuwasabha and Panchthar and migrated to the area considering it fertile and safe. Some went to Sikkim and Assam.

2. Lawati clan: There has not yet been a direct study on the special migration of Lawati clan. But historical sources (e.g. Chemjong, 1966 and Regmi,

1976), cultural similarities (Subba, 1992), kipat practice, oral fiction (Bhandari, 2010 and Kafle, 2065), and census data confirm that the Lawati Limbu migrated from Mewakhola region to Panchthar, Ilam, and Tehrathum. it happens. Such migrations occurred mainly in the 18th and 19th centuries due to land search, population growth, the influence of Buddhism, and political instability, and social relations.

3. Mabuhang clan: The migration of limbus of Mabuhang clan started from the 16th-19th century is proved to have taken place in different areas including Mewa Khola → Panchthar → Ilam → Dhankuta/Tehrathum (Subba, 1999, 2001). Its study requires the coordination of genealogy, colonial records, oral history, and geographical evidence. Reasons for migration: the need for security and land were prominent.

4. Tilung clan: Migrated from Siwa (Taplejung) to Sankhuwasabha, Bhojpur and Sunsari. The reason: fear of war and the search for arable land (Subba, 1999a).

The above are just a few examples. However, the migration trend among the Limbus in the 18th-19th centuries brought about a major change in the geographical and social structure of the community.

4.4 Anthropological perspectives

Dr. Nawa Raj Subba's study (2023) analyzes Tungdunge Mundhum from an anthropological point of view. He has established a blood relation between the Sen and Samba dynasty using a socio-biological model. This story is not just a folk tale but a historical document, which highlights the cultural and historical relationship of the Kirat civilization.

Subba uses knowledge of public health, literature, culture, psychology and anthropology to present this story as a social consciousness beyond religious myth. His study has further highlighted the aspects associated with the Sen dynasty of Limbu layers such as Samba, Yonghang, Chabegu, Lingden. The act of showing this hereditary relationship is based on the theory of historical facts, genealogies, additional socio-biological model (Wilson, 1975).

4.5 Further research

The various stories of Tungdunge Mundhum show Tungdunge as a multi-faceted character. Some stories tell the story of Tungdunge being killed by Bhotes and washed away in Tambar river (Sherma, 2009). There is a narrative that in the mundhum related to Tungdunge of Ninglekhu Limbu clan, he first tied him without knowing him and later worshiped him by making a stage after knowing him. These stories portray Tungdunge as a saint, fighter, and romantic character.

Although these are mythical stories, some historical truth may be rooted or hidden. That is, whatever the form, something in essence may have happened. For example, during the Gorkhali expansion (after 1773), Tungdunge may have resisted being displaced from Chaudandi and may have been killed by espionage. Although not all myths are genuine in their stated form and are symbolic, they do demonstrate not just a story of Tungdunge but also a historical occurrence and presence. More research is needed to confirm the extent to which the prevailing myths are symbolic and how true they are.

5. Conclusion

Tungdunge Mundhum in Kirat tradition is the cultural, social and historical heritage of the Limbu community. The story documents the identity of the Samba clan, its connection to the Sen dynasty, and the migration of the Kirat community. Dr. Nawa Raj Subba's research establishes this story as a historical document beyond myth.

Even today, Tungdunge Mundhum is a living tradition prevalent in Nepal, India, Bhutan and abroad. This story connects the Limbu community with cultural unity, identity and pride. Therefore, Tungdunge Mundhum is not just a remembrance of the past, but a cultural root for the future.

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